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Bureau of Public Affairs • Department of State

The Horn of Africa: U.S. Policy

February 1986

Background: The Horn of Africa, situated on the northeast corner of the African continent, includes Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, and parts of Kenya. These countries occupy a strategic location notable for access to the Red Sea, proximity to the Persian Gulf, and control over the headwaters of the Nile River.

In recent years, chronic drought in the Horn has produced a major crisis as millions of Ethiopians and Sudanese suffered from a severe famine. The US has been in the forefront of an unprecedented international movement to provide emergency aid. In fiscal year 1985, the US Government provided more than $500 million in such aid to the countries of the Horn. US private interests donated an additional $150 million. In fiscal year 1986 expenditures of $200 million are planned to meet the US share of emergency food needs.

Continuing conflict: The political-military situation in the Horn is complicated by internal and regional conflicts and by various external alliances. Somali irredentist claims against neighboring territories inhabited by ethnic Somalis led to an undeclared Somali-Kenyan war in the late 1960s and to a Somali invasion of Ethiopia's Ogaden region in 1977-78. The Somali attack, fought with Soviet-supplied weapons, was repulsed after Ethiopia--following the Soviet Union's precipitous change of sides--also drew upon massive infusions of Soviet weaponry and Cuban combat troops. In return for their help, the Soviets received naval and air facilities in Ethiopia. Elsewhere in Ethiopia, opposition movements based in the provinces of Tigre and Eritrea continue to challenge the central government through concerted, well-armed insurgencies.

A large Soviet-bloc presence remains in Ethiopia (1,700 Soviet advisers and perhaps 2,500 Cuban troops) and in nearby South Yemen. Ethiopia now has the largest standing army in sub-Saharan Africa, following major expansion of its military forces and massive deliveries of Soviet arms. With these weapons the Ethiopian Government vigorously pursues the civil war in Eritrea and Tigre provinces. It also supports Sudanese and Somali insurgent movements that threaten neighboring governments and regional peace.

In August 1981, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen concluded a tripartite pact; terrorist and guerrilla attacks against Sudan and Somalia soon followed. In June 1982, Ethiopian regular troops collaborated with a smaller number of Somali dissidents in attacks along the disputed Somali-Ethiopian frontier. Ethiopian forces have since occupied two salients of Somali territory at Balenbale and Goldogob.

US objectives: For many years, the US has followed a consistent policy of promoting regional security, economic growth, and internal

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stability. US interests include safeguarding shipping lanes and access to regional airports and harbors should US military forces be required to protect our friends and interests.

- We have helped nations of the Horn through humanitarian aid, support for development, and--where opportunity exists, as in Sudan today--encouragement of democracy.
- We have emphasized economic assistance and development. We provided $360 million in non-emergency assistance last year and strongly supported reforms that would promote income equity and greater agricultural production.
- The US is an outspoken critic of human rights abuses--for example, in Ethiopia where secret executions are all too common and other abuses of a Marxist state are aggravated by coercive government resettlement and "villagization" programs. These programs, which we seek to halt, are implemented in a brutal fashion, separating families, forcing people to work for inadequate rations in unhealthful locations, and causing many deaths.
- US security policy has been clearly aimed at deterring aggression. We deployed US radar planes in Sudan to counter the Libyan invasion of Chad and again in response to the bombing of Omdurman, a Sudanese town. Similarly, we sent emergency military supplies to Somalia in 1982 to counter Ethiopian incursions.
- US military assistance has been carefully designed to improve our friends' ability to protect themselves; it has not encouraged aggression in the Horn.
- The US has never sought to exploit tensions within the region. On the contrary, we have conditioned our assistance on the pursuit of peaceful settlements.

US initiatives: We are advancing our policy in the region through a variety of specific initiatives:

- We will provide substantial assistance to the friendly states of the region--about $300 million in development assistance, economic support funds, and regular food assistance in fiscal year 1986.
- We have made it clear that we would welcome signs from Ethiopia that it, too, seeks improved regional relationships and an end to policies of confrontation.
- We have challenged the Soviet Union to seek stability and peace rather than instability in the Horn.
- We will continue to coordinate with other major bilateral donors and with international financial institutions in promoting comprehensive programs to meet financial problems facing Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya.
- We fully support and respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states in the region, as well as the Organization of African Unity's position on the acceptance of post-colonial borders in Africa. We support efforts to negotiate an end to specific conflicts in the region on the basis of these principles.

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